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ABSTRACT

Current U.S. policies toward Central American nations motivated this examination of the presentation of the region in 12 social studies textbooks. In order to determine if each text's treatment of Central America was representative of the entire book, three regions, Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean were selected for comparison purposes. The Evaluation Coefficient (ECO) analysis technique was used to determine the attitudes conveyed. To analyze the illustrations, the McDiarmid and Pratt procedures for identifying stereotypes in textbook illustrations were adapted. An evaluation system, developed by F. P. Hunkins and adapted from Bloom's "Taxonomy of Educational Objectives," was used to analyze the text questions and their distribution across six cognition levels: knowledge, comprehension; application; analysis; synthesis; and evaluation. Each textbook's treatment of major events and conditions in Central America was compared to protocols developed from current scholarship on the geography, early civilizations, the Spanish conquest and colonization, recent history, and current events and conditions of each of the seven nations. A summary of the study indicated that: (1) the ECO analysis was neutral to positive; (2) illustrations were more limited in range and number of pages for Central America than the comparison areas; and (3) cognition levels were generally low, with the knowledge level predominating. A six-item reference list is included. (DJC)

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# THE PORTRAYAL OF CENTRAL AMERICA IN SELECTED CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL STUDIES TEXTBOOKS: AN OUTLINE OF THE METHODOLOGY

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My study is based on the assumption that textbooks convey attitudes towards groups of people and that these attitudes can be determined. The focus is on Central America, because it is an area of conflict and one in which United States influence is being challenged. It represents current changing conditions in the world which are of concern to people in the United States. U.S. citizens, functioning in a representative democracy, have both the right and the need to have adequate and unbiased textbook treatment of such issues.

**Selection of the Textbooks and Comparison Regions**

Textbooks at the junior high and middle school level were chosen for the study because it is at this level, according to the standard social studies curriculum, that students are first exposed to content on Central America (Patrick, 1982). The list of 12 texts to be examined was determined by state adoption lists of states which construct such lists and their availability through the Social Studies Resource Center at Indiana University. The texts can be divided into three categories: western hemisphere texts, world geographies, and what I will term a North America text, which is primarily focused on the United States.

Recent events in Central America were of concern at the time of this study; the Sandinista triumph in Nicaragua occurred in 1979 and the civil war in El Salvador, which had been widening since 1971, dramatically escalated in 1979. The new

Panama Canal treaties were signed in 1977; Belize gained its independence from Britain in 1981. In order to determine whether or not these events in Central America were reflected in the textbooks' content, to determine what differences exist between texts published before and after 1979, and to identify possible trends in the more recent portrayal of Central America, two editions of the same text were selected whenever possible.

In order to determine if each text's treatment of Central America is representative of the entire book, three regions were selected for comparison purposes. They are: Canada, chosen because it is a northern rather than southern neighbor of the United States, yet it is a country with a culture very different from Central America; Mexico, chosen for its similarities to Central America in history and culture and its differences in size and economic power; and the Caribbean, chosen because of the similarity of United States foreign policy concerns with communist expansion in Cuba and Nicaragua.

**Methodology**

Textbooks used in the study were subjected to four quantitative analyses and one qualitative analysis. Because of the limited treatment of Central America in the five world geographies and the one North America text, the analyses of evaluative terms, illustrations, and cognitive level of questions were limited to the six western hemisphere texts. The fourth quantitative analysis, that of coverage, included all

twelve texts, as did the qualitative analysis of the treatment of major events and conditions in Central America where it occurred. Because the primary concern of this study is with the portrayal of present-day conditions in Central America, the texts' treatments of the early history, the conquest, and the colonial period were included only in the qualitative analysis.

## I. Analysis of Evaluative Terms

The first analysis conducted determined the attitudes conveyed in the textbooks. The Evaluation Coefficient (ECO) analysis technique was adopted for this task. Pratt (1972) developed this system out of his earlier work (Pratt, 1969) in which he determined that value judgments in texts were the main vehicle for the communication of attitudes, were least apparent to the casual reader, and represented a gratuitous evaluation, independent of the text's obligation to state facts (p. 14).

The ECO analysis of the textbooks produced numerical scores for their respective treatments of Central American and each of the three comparison areas. ECO scores can range from 0.0 (totally unfavorable) to 100.0 (totally favorable) and enable the texts' treatments of the subjects of interest to be located on a favorable-unfavorable continuum so they may be compared.

The ECO Word List contains approximately 300 words with evaluative connotations. A score sheet includes the page number, the term, and its direction of evaluativeness (positive,

neutral, or negative). Content of each text allocated to present-day Central America and the three comparison areas was examined carefully for evaluative terms. Each time a word was used which expresses a favorable or unfavorable value judgment of the subject, the word was listed on the score sheet in the "term" column. Words not on the ECO list were judged according to the value assigned to a synonym. When all evaluative terms were listed on the score sheet and scored as favorable (+), unfavorable (-), or neutral (0), the Coefficient of Evaluation was calculated by the formula:

$$\frac{100F}{(F+U)}$$

where F represents the number of favorable terms and U represents the number of unfavorable terms. To ensure a degree of reliability, the coefficient must be based on a minimum of ten evaluative term. This requirement prevented analyzing the Central American countries individually. This minimum sample size ensures that the coefficient of evaluation is subject to a maximum standard of error of one-third of a standard deviation (Pratt, 1972, p. 123).

From the complete list of terms for each region, a count was made of the terms most frequently used to describe each subject. This frequency count adds a further dimension to the purely numerical coefficient, since it indicates the attitudes as well as their degree of favorableness or unfavorableness.

Two kinds of validity are evident for the ECO instrument. First, it has face validity, inferred from its design. It

claims to measure the evaluation of subjects (e.g., ethnic groups or countries), and it does so by counting the frequency with which words expressing value judgments are applied to the subject. Second, it has predictive validity, evident from findings from research using the ECO analysis instrument which differentiated between groups of texts and treatments of several different groups in texts in the expected directions.

Inter-rater reliability of the ECO instrument was determined by comparing the ratings of four raters, each trained in the procedure, who each scored nine passages from selected texts. The correlations (Pearson rs) between the coefficients for pairs of raters ranged from .92 to .96 (Pratt, 1977, p. 28). Test-retest reliability of ECO analysis, determined by having the analysts rescore passages a week after they had first scored them, yielded a reliability score of .79. Consistency of the instrument was determined by a sampling procedure in which coefficients based on analyses of complete texts were compared with coefficients from analyses of every second, third, fifth, and tenth page. The lowest of the resulting correlations was .90.

## II. Analysis of Illustrations

The procedure to analyze illustrations for stereotypes emulates one used by McDiarmid and Pratt (1972). It determines whether certain groups are stereotyped in textbook illustrations, and if so, what the stereotypes are. A score sheet

classifies characteristics of appearance and attitude into the following categories:

a) Clothing
   - o western dress
   - o native costume

b) Activity
   - o hunt, gather, prepare food, work in home
   - o manual, farm, craft, trade in markets
   - o skilled, professional
   - o attend school
   - o leisure or idle
   - o exotic, ceremonial
   - o other

c) Economic class
   - o rich
   - o upper middle class
   - o lower middle class
   - o poor

d) Role
   - o public figure
   - o common person

e) Setting
   - o public, family
   - o workplace
   - o government
   - o church

f) Role of women and children
   - o traditional
   - o nontraditional

Instances of each category were tallied from illustrations containing people within units and chapters on Central America and the three comparison areas. Illustrations of the early Indian civilizations, the conquests, and the colonial period were not included in this analysis since the central concern of this study is the texts' treatment of present-day conditions. Economic classes were determined on the basis of clothing, the home environment (when shown), the activity, and words in the

text. Data were summarized using simple descriptive statistics (frequency distributions, means, and percentages). Inter-rater reliabilities for the study conducted by McDiarmid and Pratt were determined to be at least .93 in all categories except Activity, which was .63.

The methodology used for this study was similar to that suggested by McDiarmid and Pratt except for four modifications. First, two of the categories (disposition and authority) were eliminated because too few instances of them occurred in these texts. Second, two categories (economic class and role) were added. Third, only one rater, myself, was used. Fourth, unlike McDiarmid and Pratt's raters, I had read the accompanying text in these books before analyzing the illustrations, a possible contaminant. For example, if I was viewing a cane cutter in a field, knowing it occurred in the context of a discussion of Haitian poverty likely influenced my categorization of the economic class of the individual depicted. I performed the analysis twice, with approximately one month between analyses, and asked a Latin America specialist to referee any disagreements that occurred between my two, separate, categorizations of the illustration.

## III. Analysis of Questions

This analysis employs an evaluation system developed by Hunkins (1973) in which he adapted Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives to determine the levels of cognition

required by text questions and their distribution across cognitive levels. All questions in chapters or units on Central America were examined. Questions in teachers' guides and student workbooks were not included because these materials were not available for all the texts. Because their use typically indicates a more "in-depth" study than the use of texts alone, their questions are likely to require higher levels of cognition than the texts.

The six levels (Bloom, 1954, pp. 201-7) of questions are:

Knowledge level: Questions requiring recognition or recall of facts, ideas or phenomena.

Example: "What are the five original Central American countries?"

Comprehension level: Questions requiring understanding of the content and the ability to relate it to other material.

Example: "Draw a picture or diagram showing the steps involved in growing, harvesting, and skipping bananas."

Application level: Questions requiring use of the content in a context different from its original presentation.

Example: "Name three major steps you would take to solve the housing shortage in El Salvador."

Analysis level: Questions requiring the breakdown of a communication into its constituent parts and the identification of relationships among the parts.

Example: "Compare and contrast Juanito's life with your own."

Synthesis level: Questions requiring the assembling of elements and parts into a whole.

Example: "Using information you have read about Nicaragua, pretend that you are a twelve-year-old student living in Leon and write a letter to a pen-pal in the United States describing your life."

Evaluation level: Questions requiring judgments about the value of material and methods.

Example: "Which of the United States' policies and practices in Central America have helped the people of El Salvador? Which have hurt?"

Data were summarized using simple, descriptive statistics.

**IV. Quantitative Analysis of Coverage**

Pages allocated to Central America and other geographic areas were counted in each of the 12 texts, and percentages of the total pages in each text were calculated. Pages were counted as part of an area's content if they were in the text's table of contents as a unit, chapter, or section of a chapter on the region. Single pages and fractions of pages devoted to a geographic area, yet contained in more general content, were counted as the broader category. For example, an eight-page chapter on early civilizations in which the Mayas, Aztecs, and Incas are allocated two, three, and three pages respectively, was not counted as content on Central America, Mexico, and South America respectively, but as part of the Latin America category.

This approach was taken because the pages in question did not relate directly to present-day Central America.

**V. Qualitative Analysis**

Each textbook's treatment of major events and conditions in Central America was compared to protocols that outline the main established facts. I developed the protocols from current scholarship on Central America available in the United States. The protocols include: the geography, the early civilizations, the Spanish conquest and colonization, the recent history, and the current events and conditions of each of the seven Central American nations.

Selection of the events included in this analysis was based on my knowledge of historic and current conditions in Central America. Four examples convey the kinds of events that were examined. The Panama Canal is an obvious choice because it is included in most texts and, because of the involvement of the United States in its construction and supervision, the topic is prone to nationalistic biases, inaccuracies, and errors of omission. The 1954 coup d'etat in Guatemala was labeled "Operation Success" by United States government officials. United States involvement in the operation, particularly the CIA's role in carrying out the clandestine military operation, is no longer a secret. Whether or not the story, as it is now known, is told to junior high students, and, if it is, the degree of accuracy with which it is told is of interest in this

study. The "Matanza"--the 1932 killing of over 30,000 peasants in El Salvador--is the major event of the century in that country and is generally considered a beginning of that country's present civil unrest. Similarly, the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua has its roots in liberation movements of the 1920s, and its success in 1979 represents the greatest challenge to United States hegemony in the region. This study describes the nature of the treatment of these subjects by textbook publishers. For example, colonization and the introduction of African slaves were major determiners of the Central American reality, as they were in the United States. The degree to which these factors are cast in historical perspective is a critical factor in judging these textbooks' accuracy, and accordingly, their value as educational tools.

Three conditions--lifestyle, religion, and political systems--are typically included in the description of any country. The literature review suggests that textbooks often contain bias against in low socioeconomic classes and people whose religions or political systems differ from those of the United States. Comparisons of these textbooks' treatments of such topics with the protocols can indicate the adequacy of those treatments and the degree to which they contain bias.

United States military and economic involvement in Central America is also necessarily included in the protocols on Panama and the Panama Canal, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. An adequate treatment of Central America, however, would also address such

events as the establishment of Honduras as a "banana republic" and the occupation of Nicaragua by the United States Marines during the period 1912 - 1933. Their inclusion of such topics and the nature of their treatment are key criteria in judging the adequacy of their treatment.

**Brief Summary of a Wholistic Analysis of Data**

Results of the analyses yielded data which were consistent with expectations. The evaluative stance the texts take toward Central America and the three comparison areas through use of evaluative terms (ECO analysis) is generally neutral to positive. The treatment of Central America in illustrations and in coverage is more limited in range and number of pages respectively for Central America than the comparison areas. The levels of cognition required in questions on content on Central America were generally low with the knowledge level predominating.

Qualitative analysis which considers the texts' treatment of a variety of topics, including the geography, history, and current events and conditions in the area, indicates a wide range of adequacy across the 12 texts. Central America is portrayed as an area of little importance. The purpose of the texts appear to be a presentation of a series of facts rather than the stimulation of critical thinking; conflict is minimized, and conditions such as poverty and oppression receive equal emphasis to conditions such as racial composition and the

number of miles of paved roads. Middle-class values of the United States are applied to present-day Central American people and even to the Maya civilization.

The use of the ECO Analysis in the study raises questions regarding the adequacy of limiting an analysis to the use of only one instrument. This instrument counts only one aspect of texts--evaluative terms--but is not sensitive to subtleties of quality of content. An "unfavorable" score (24.3) was assigned to the treatment of Central America in one of the texts, a score which may lead to the conclusion that this text presents the Central American region unfavorably--as an "unpleasant" area with a great many "problems." This conclusion is inaccurate. While these words are used in the text's content, a qualitative analysis indicates that the treatment is actually more adequate than texts which use far fewer evaluative terms. This text's treatment includes more of the major historical events than several of the other texts and it attempts to relate them in a historical context. Use of negatively-charged words in this text, then, more accurately represents the conditions of Central America--which are unpleasant and full of problems--than it does a negative bias of the text's authors and editors.

## Conclusion

Data resulting from text book analysis indicate the adequacy of the texts as educational tools. Do texts promote our democratic ideals and the objectives of developing critically thinking, socially conscientious citizens who use the knowledge acquired in schools and continue to learn throughout their lives? Or do they stifle thinking, misinform, and convey negative attitudes about people in a different area of the world? The degree to which texts are adequate transmitters of knowledge and attitudes and guides in the development of cognitive skills can best be determined by a wholistic analysis which includes use of both quantitative and qualitative methodology. Identifying areas of strength and weakness in texts, and developing methodology which leads to the clarification and definition of accurate, adequate, and unbiased texts, are essential steps in their development.

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